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Abstract

The disparities in urban/nonurban education can be changed through community participation and a redistribution of educational revenues. The high positive correlation of race and economic class to school achievement is the most pressing concern of education today. Public pressure is necessary to resist the tendency toward bureaucratic isolation of school systems and to force school officials to be more accountable for their product in terms of pupil achievement. School finance in the form of general State allocations favors the rural and suburban areas due to their relatively greater legislative power. State school aid formulas neglect the heavier proportion of noneducational expenditures a central city tax base must support. The facts show that the distribution of Federal funds is equally biased against city school districts. This inequality of finance is of central importance for solving the problems of urban education. (LN)

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"Priorities in Urban Education"

by

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It is difficult to discuss the problems and possibilities in urban education without first reflecting on the social and political context in which the nation finds itself as the 1960's - a decade which began so hopefully - soon haltingly creak to an inauspicious conclusion.

The 1960's have been full of paradoxes for the United States. A decade of unparalleled economic growth and prosperity has also witnessed an acute, persisting condition of poverty among a sizeable minority of citizens. More than ten years of poignant toil in the civil rights vineyards have produced signal victories against discrimination, but as these ten years end, the nation is perhaps more bitterly divided over racial problems than was the case before the civil rights movement began. A nation that can place its astronauts on the moon cannot, or rather, does not, adequately feed its poor or effectively educate their children.

Similar paradoxes are observed in education. Consider these three, for example.

1. Fourteen years after the Supreme Court unanimously declared that segregated education was inherently inferior and unconstitutional, most American schools remain segregated. Educators as often as not resisted desegregation or were unenthusiastic about desegregation. Few non-whites are to

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be found among research, development, and administration personnel in education.

2. Fiscal disparities between rich and poor school districts have not been diminished significantly in recent years, despite substantial school district reorganization, Federal aid for disadvantaged children, and a half century of pious talk about equal educational opportunity.

3. Demands for better quality education for poor children, largely unheeded at local and state levels, were finally pressed at the Federal level in the mid-1960's, but all Federal funding for public education still is only 8% of total expenditures.

Meanwhile, social pressures for educational change are intensifying, particularly in large urban school districts. Significant portions of urban school clientele groups are obviously losing confidence in educators and in the institution of public education. Schools, like other urban institutions, are caught in what John Gardner calls:

> "a savage crossfire between uncritical lovers and unloving critics. On the one side, those who loved their institutions tended to smother them in an embrace of death, loving their rigidities more than their promise, shielding them from life-giving criticism. On the other side, there arose a breed of critics without love, skilled in demolition but untutored in the arts by which human institutions are nutured and strengthened and made to flourish."

While public education has made historic contributions to American life and is accepted by most Americans as adequately serving their needs, something has gone wrong -- tragically wrong -- in the heart of our great cities. To put it bluntly, many urban schools simply aren't working; the students know it, the parents know it, the teachers know it, the consultants know it, and the researchers know it.

But only recently have we begun systematic attempts to develop successful methods of really educating disadvantaged children. The network of regional education laboratories and university research centers are institutionalized evidences of ~~the~~ of operating educational institutions to design, nurture and sustain the R & D function.

Suffice it to say that although your political honeymoon, such as it was, is probably over, it is still too soon to expect dramatic results from your efforts, so I remain cautiously, and perhaps naively, optimistic. This audience contains some of the nation's best expertise in the management and conduct of research and development activities, and I shall not presume to lecture you on that subject. Thus, in these remarks I will concentrate on a substantive discussion of a few problems in urban education, problems hopefully meriting your attention in the months and years ahead. I shall leave to the listener and to distinguished speakers like Professors Chase, Etzioni, and Campbell a more direct analysis of how, or whether, research and development activities will resolve the problems.

A View of Urban Education's Problems

Children from backgrounds of racial segregation and poverty -- whether urban or rural -- begin school handicapped. Their verbal skills may be severely limited; their motivation to do school work may be inadequate; their attitudes may be inappropriate. Without the opportunity to overcome these initial disadvantages, the poor child or the child from a minority group is likely to be several grade levels below his peers in the acquisition of basic skills -- reading, writing, and mathematics -- skills vital to full participation in our society. These early differences in achievement level do not disappear or decrease but become greater as disadvantaged children continue through schools. Similarly, it is these same children who, later on in the education system, are high school dropouts or, having completed high school, do not continue their education. In some urban high schools the dropout rate for minority group children is three times that of their advantaged peers, a disparity tragically reflected in unemployment data.

Thus, disparities in educational achievement are real. Certainly, many factors are responsible for these disparities, some at home and some at school. But only school programs can be directly influenced in the near future by public policy. If the achievement of all children is to be maximized, school programs from preschool through college must be overhauled and expanded for many children whose home situation places them at a disadvantage when entering the school system.

The eventual result of this approach will never be equal achievement, because of differences in individual ability. But, actual achievement will be much less closely correlated with race and economic status than at present and presumably more closely correlated with individual ability. This is what equality of opportunity is all about.

This stress on the results of education also thrusts upon the school the responsibility for student achievement, not just for provision of educational services, a distinction which is at the heart of many current conflicts in urban education.

Therefore, I suggest that the most pressing concern on the agenda of American education today is to find and implement ways to reduce the high correlation between race and economic class, and school achievement. I hope that one result of this Conference will be a renewed determination on your part to focus your considerable talent and energy on some part of this great challenge of the 1970's. Tackle some part of this agenda as <u>your</u> responsibility.

This agenda for action has many parts. Consider these problems for openers:

1. Population shifts now in their fifth decade continue to concentrate in cities persons with low incomes who by any standard are not being well educated in city schools.

2. Apart from problems of effectiveness, key target populations needing educational services but not now receiving them include poor children under age five, adolescents both

out of school and out of work, and youth denied access to post high school education because of racial or financial reasons.

3. School governance in cities is an archaic patchwork of unresponsive bureaucracy so dominated by habit and custom that reform is unlikely without extreme external threats to the institution.

4. Research in the social and behavioral sciences has not yet produced answers to overcome the basic problems of communications and intellectual development that underlie learning problems of the disadvantaged.

In the remainder of these remarks, I will concentrate on two problems of urban education central to all others: community participation and adequate financing. How these problems are resolved will profoundly affect the R & D community's role in urban education as well as the future of urban public schools as they are now structured.

Community Participation and School Accountability

Educators concerned about the loss of confidence in schools manifest in urban areas today should strongly support increased community involvement and participation in school affairs. There are several fundamental reasons for this position.

First, recent struggles between community residents and school officials represent a clash of conflicting interests which is basically, although not exclusively, a clash between black people and white people. Black parents who waited more than a decade after 1954 for meaningful integration of schools, or aggressive pursuit of that goal by educators, understandably changed strategies and desire control over the key institutions of government which affect them. That schools are high on that list is testimony to the moot faith so many disadvantaged Americans have in the efficacy -- or potential efficacy -- of public education to help their children have a better life. But unless some of the legitimate demands of minority group leaders are quickly and visibly realized, increased conflict between school and client may deal a death blow to the functioning of urban public schools in many neighborhoods. The symptoms of this potential tragedy are already present: many urban high schools lock their students in the building, have police patrol the halls, and still cannot avoid recurrent violence and uncontrolled absenteeism. I ask you: is it reasonable to expect schooling to succeed if parent and child are hostile to the school?

A second reason for increased citizen participation flows from an understanding of the nature of institutions. In order to improve this society we must have institutions which are geared to change, capable of self renewal, responsive to demands from the people they serve. Citizen participation and responsibility in educational decision-making at school, neighborhood, and citywide levels has

the potential to open up insulated and bureaucratized educational systems to a new set of voices. The effects of this type of influence are likely to persevere more than the implementation of any specific internal educational reform, because it alters the basic allocations of power within the system and provides a permanent method for client demands to be heard, much in the way they are heard in smaller school districts, few of which today are as far out of kilter with the people they serve as the large urban school systems.

A third reason is related to the matter of public accountability of school systems. Controversies in several large cities concern the demand of parents to review evidence of pupil performance, such as achievement and other test data or dropout figures, and to hold school personnel accountable for this performance. Unfortunately, by tradition teachers are not held accountable for their basic activity: teaching children. Present arrangements for holding schools accountable to the public stress primarily process rather than product, public relations rather than pupil achievement, fiscal management rather than the dropout rate, means rather than ends. Parents in city school districts thus face twin obstacles of unacceptable levels of institutional performance and the absence of mechanisms by which school personnel can be held accountable to the public.

Educational research and development agencies have much to contribute to efforts to increase the usefulness of information about urban schools that is available to the public. Key problems here include the development of specific and clearly stated educational objectives accepted by parents and students as well as teachers and curriculum directors; the development of arrangements to monitor pupil progress toward objectives and through the educational system by achievement area, by school, by school district, by economic class, and by race, so that, among other uses, innovtions produced by research and development activities or introduced by community groups can be tested against independent criteria; and the development of ways to organize and present information about an entire school system so that an intelligent citizen (that is, someone other than a computer programmer or an educational psychologist) can understand it. I foresee the day when cities will operate local assessment programs similar to the national assessment now underway.

Realizing such reforms will require of educational research and development personnel not only skilled craftsmanship, but also the capacity to tell the forest from the trees. It will also require white researchers to secure the assent of minority leadership before conducting studies of disadvantaged children; such assent may be difficult to obtain in some cities and may lead to a breakdown of the tradition dichotomy between "school" and "community."

Financing Urban Schools

The most obvious fiscal problem of urban education is that city schools do not have enough money. The aggregate level of resources currently being allocated to urban education by local, state, and national governments is inadequate when compared to requirements for expensive educational services, and systematically below levels observed in several cities, where school revenues may be insufficient even to keep schools open for the entire school year.

But this seemingly simple problem of level of resources turns out, on closer examination, to be a combination of numerous overlapping and sometimes contradictory factors deeply imbedded in the intricate intergovernmental relations of our Federal system. For instance, some problems are primarily local in character, such as municipal overburden, shrinking assessment ratios, or decaying property tax base.

But when such fiscal circumstances are combined with the steady flow of educated people out of cities, and their replacement in the city by less well educated persons requiring extensive public services, such as education, city schools find themselves in a double bind so serious that the problems exceed the problem-solving capacity of local structures and resources.

Unfortunately, these problems are more often compounded than alleviated by state action. City schools are often hamstrung by state limitations on their taxing power, and by state aid formulas which favor rural and suburban districts. State school aid formulas do not take into account the fact that the central city tax base must be used in a much heavier proportion for non-educational purposes than is true in suburbia. The result is that state aid, measured on a per student basis, is frequently higher to suburban districts than it is to city districts.

Then, there are problems flowing from the nature of Federal aid to urban schools. This aid is at present small in volume, fragmented in structure, and uncoordinated in administration.

One problem relevant to how the Federal government can aid urban schools is that even if the present resource differences between city and suburban schools were filled (temporarily) by Federal money, suburban-oriented state legislatures might well match Federal aid to cities with additional state aid to suburbs as a way of maintaining the favorable position of suburbs vis-a-vis cities. Further, the form of Federal aid is important, because general aid dollars usually allow local officials the de facto choices of spending the dollars for increased services (such as R & D activities), reducing local tax effort (either directly or by juggling the local property assessment ratio), or having the funds substantially absorbed by pay increases for school personnel.

The matter of fragmentation is symptomatic of a more serious problem. One of the key fiscal statistics upon which Federal policy should be built is the aggregate Federal aid to each local educational agency, including all Federal programs aiding public schools. Such data would be extremely useful in identifying the extent to which a particular national priority, say, urban education, is receiving support at the present time. In other words, it would tell us what our policy now is. Unfortunately, these data are now available only in crude and incomplete form.

The Urban Coalition is now pulling together 1968 USOE data regarding the flow of Federal funds to large school districts. Preliminary results indicate that large districts receive only below average priority in Federal aid allocations. For example: Baltimore, Maryland has 22% of the students in the state of Maryland and receives 44% of ESEA Title I funds. However, it receives only 14% of Maryland's funds under ESEA Title II, 2% of Maryland's funds under Title III ESEA, none of Maryland's funds under NDEA Title III, 11% of Maryland's funds under NDEA Title 5-A, 5% of Maryland's funds under PL 874, 16% of Maryland's funds under vocational education, and only 11% under the school lunch program. It is apparent that under most Federal aid programs, Baltimore receives an inequitable share of the distribution, even using such a simplistic measure of equity as pupil enrollment.

Federal aid itself may thus indirectly contribute to unfortunate urban/non-urban disparities in education. Nothing in overall distribution patterns for Federal aid to education even suggests that the nation faces incipient revolution in its urban schools.

Let us hope the Nixon Administration develops and supports for FY 1971 an urban education bill focusing substantial new Federal resources on the problems of urban education.

There are many other problems I could discuss, but time is limited. I summarize: develop educational strategies to reduce the scandalous correlation between race and economic class, and school achievement; develop ways for the public to be efficiently informed about pupil progress toward school objectives; and recognize that progress on issues of community participation and adequate state and Federal financing are central to any practical approach to solving the problems of urban education.

The educational research and development community has much to contribute to the nation's work on these problems.

I look forward to the decade of the 1970's knowing we are better organized to face up to them than 10 years ago, but also fearing that if we are to avoid chaos in our cities, we must make considerably faster progress in the future than in the past.